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*Agency of Human Services*

January 12, 2006

Mr. Ed Paquin  
Executive Director  
Vermont Protection & Advocacy  
141 Main Street, Suite 7  
Montpelier, VT 05602

Dear Ed:

I am writing in response to the letter of January 6 that is signed by you and 12 others. Thank you for sharing these concerns.

- 1) We agree that it is important to increase the participation of consumers in the Vermont Mental Health Futures Initiative, particularly the work groups. This will take a sustained effort and focus. Therefore I am asking Nick Nichols of the division staff to work with the Futures project team to assist in this, and we would welcome your efforts as well as those of the other organizations whose representatives signed the letter.
- 2) Voluntary programs are our goal. To the extent that "not totally voluntary" programs are supported as part of the Futures Initiative, they must a) be designed in a way that accommodates migration to "totally voluntary," and b) must be financed in a way that provides incentive to achieve such migration or at least provides no incentive to defer it. I am not clear what the specific concern is regarding the sub acute rehab programs. Currently we envision that VSH patients leaving the hospital would have the same discharge planning process to sub acute as is in place now for discharge to any other program -- namely, the transition tools such as short visits or pre-placement visits that are used to assess the client's own preferences and the goodness of fit for proposed placements. Clients served in the sub acute programs would likely either be discharged completely or placed on an Order of Non-Hospitalization, as is the current practice.
- 3) We have, of course, experienced delays implementing the sub acute rehab programs. The trouble with some of the tentative timelines that have been put forward is that they set goals for processes we don't always control. The ambitious goals set out early in this process served the useful and appropriate purpose of signaling our priorities and the sense of urgency we felt and intended to impart to everyone involved. Now, as architects and program people begin developing and studying concrete proposals, the timelines will become less theoretical and more tied to tangible, achievable goals. As would be the case with any large project that is moving from the theoretical to the practical stage, you may expect to see amended timelines for this project in coming months that are grounded

more specifically in the details of our evolving plans. The Governor's budget, which will be published in coming days, will detail funding for the Futures Initiative.

- 4) A formal response to the Fletcher Allen recommendations was sent last month, but discussions of implementing the recommendations were already under way. We embrace the direction and intent of the report, we are working out the details of some of the general recommendations, we expect to follow some of the specific suggestions, and we may decline to follow others. On balance, the report is a good start.
- 5) The architectural firm will meet with stakeholders beginning next week. We have not prejudged the inpatient site selection, although it is obviously the strong preference of the Futures Group that the new inpatient service be on the campus of, or within sight of, Fletcher Allen. We cannot know if this site preference is possible until we better define the size and physical characteristics of the service we are talking about. If the FAHC location is not going to work, we and FAHC are both aware of the importance of making that determination as early as possible. There is a limit, however, to our ability to pursue multiple site possibilities simultaneously. It is our intent, following the recommendation of the Futures Group, to focus on FAHC and to discover as quickly as possible if that option is not going to work. Whether the services are offered at FAHC or elsewhere, however, the next step is to identify the size and characteristics of the program we are going to try to site.
- 6) We agree that it is critically important to publish a weekly update. John Howland Jr. joined the Futures Initiative at the beginning of the calendar year and we expect to hire additional staff in the coming weeks to assist with increasing access to important information as this project goes forward. The Health Department will be publishing a new website in early February, and we intend to post virtually all the minutes and other basic documents for the Futures Initiative as 2006 proceeds.

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Mr. Ed Paquin

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I appreciate both the tone and content your letter, and I look forward to working with you in 2006.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Paul Blake (MSW)".

Paul Blake, MSW

Deputy Commissioner

Division of Mental Health

cc: Ken Liberto, Vermont Association for Mental Health  
Larry Lewack, National Alliance for the Mentally Ill - Vermont  
Alicia Weiss, Vermont Coalition for Disability Rights  
John McCullough, Mental Health Law Project  
Rep. Anne Donahue  
Sally S. Parrish  
David Fassler, MD  
Linda Corey, Vermont Psychiatric Survivors  
Morgan W. Brown  
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